Bull's political vision

18. Bull's Political Vision

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Both Bull and his principal work, *The Anarchical Society* (1977), are best known for developing the concept of international society and for establishing it as the centrepiece of the so-called English School of International Relations [IR] (Wight 1987, 222; Dunne 1998; Alderson and Hurrell 2000; Buzan 2004, 1, 35; Williams and Little 2006, 1).[1] Bull's work is also of wider disciplinary significance. His defence of a 'classical' approach in IR theory (Bull 1966) was, for example, a key staging post in the still ongoing debate about the nature and merits of a scientific approach to the study of world politics (Jackson 2011). It is, however, the concept of international society that has proved the most enduring of Bull's legacies, as demonstrated both in key debates within the English School, such as those over humanitarian intervention (Wheeler 2000) and the prospects for greater solidarity in world politics (Hurrell 2007), and in how other theorists, especially constructivists, have drawn on the English School (Finnemore 1996; Wendt 1999).

Forty years after its publication, reading *The Anarchical Society* as a treatise on international society can make it seem somewhat dated (Alderson and Hurrell 2000, 54; Williams and Little 2006, 2). As the contributors to this volume make clear, many of Bull's central insights do remain relevant, notably his appreciation of the obstacles to cooperation presented by competing interests and values, of the importance of informal norms and understandings, and of the capacity of the great powers to both sustain and undermine world order. This is most obvious in relation to security questions (Ayson; Ruzicka; Toros and Dionigi; Carr this volume). Yet Bull's insistence on the relative unimportance, as compared to the dynamics of the states system, of the kinds of transnational interactions highlighted, even in his own

[1] The concept of international society did not, however, originate with Bull (see Suganami and Linklater 2006).

time, by Keohane and Nye (1972) cannot be sustained today (Pauly; Falkner this volume). Reading Bull's text narrowly as a study of international society also makes it hard to relate it constructively to dimensions of world politics that have since become significant in IR, such as gender (True this volume) and empire, the legacy of which, Pasha argues (this volume), Bull's account of the demands for 'Third World' justice captures only inadequately.

In asking how persuasive *The Anarchical Society* remains today, one difficulty is, as Suganami (this volume) points out, that the book does not do quite what it sets out to. The subtitle indicates that it will be a study of *order in world politics* but Bull in fact focuses more narrowly on *international order*, as provided by the modern, global, *international* society, treating *world order* and the *world society* that might support it as a distinctly secondary concern (see Buzan 2004). This may go some way to explaining why the book is remembered chiefly for its treatment of international society. A key contribution of this volume, however, is to make clear that there is more to *The Anarchical Society* than international society, narrowly construed. Whereas Bull is often understood subsequently to have expanded his vision, most notably in the 1983 Hagey Lectures (Bull 2000), it would be more accurate to observe that the potential for an expanded vision of world politics is present within the conceptual framework Bull develops in *The Anarchical Society*, but that he chose, in that book, to restrict his focus. He judged, at the time he was writing, that a study of order in world politics should *focus* on international society. This was, however, a provisional judgement: it was very much for 'the present time', a kind of phraseology he uses repeatedly. Forty years on, we are not compelled to endorse such judgements and nor should we presume that Bull would reproduce them today.

Bull described his argument as 'an implicit defence of the states system, and more particularly of that element in it that has been called international society' (1977: 307) . This is reflected in the organisation of the text. Part I presents the concept of international society and argues for its significance, Part II shows how the master institutions of international society produce order, and Part III makes the case for the continuing merits of international society as the basis of world order. Yet it is important to recognise, as not all readers have (see Alderson and Hurrell 2000, 7), that *The Anarchical Society* is concerned,

above all, with the prospective decline of international society. This concern explains why, in Part III, Bull explores potential alternatives to international society as the basis for world order. Although he stressed the significance of international society for world order, he also recognised that it is only a contingent part of a broader world political arena. Bull's conceptual framework is, in this sense, more flexible than is often appreciated. The contributions to this volume may be collectively understood as exploring that flexibility 40 years on, noting where Bull's judgements seemed prescient, but also recognising where we now need to push his framework in different directions, and acknowledging, of course, that this flexibility has its limits. The key insight of this volume is that Bull's framework is richer than is suggested by his focus on international society and that much of this richness can be productively developed today, even if Bull himself did not maximize that potential.

With that in mind, this concluding essay proceeds as follows. First, it outlines the flexibility of Bull's conceptual framework, paying particular attention to his oft-neglected concept of the 'world political system'. Second, it lays out the range of contingent judgements that Bull reached when writing *The Anarchical Society* and indicates which of these judgements the contributors to this volume have endorsed or deemed in need of updating. Third, it highlights some of the limits the contributors have identified to this project of reading Bull more flexibly. Finally, it offers some suggestions about future inquiry.

The Flexibility of Bull's Conceptual Framework

Writing in and on the English School has long recognised that there is more to Bull and to *The Anarchical Society* than international society. In fact, Bull is often interpreted as offering a conceptual trichotomy which, corresponding to Wight's distinction between realist, rationalist, and revolutionary traditions of thought, is composed of international system, international society, and world society (Buzan 2001, 474-6; Linklater and Suganami 2006, 52). Of these, Bull elaborated world society the least. Indeed, Buzan describes it as 'the Cinderella concept of English school theory, receiving relatively little attention and almost no conceptual development' (2004, 11). This is a notable deficiency given that Bull purports to be writing a study of world order (not just international order) and that the development of a world society offers one obvious alternative to international society as the basis for world order. However, this volume shows that reading *The Anarchical Society*

through the lens of this trichotomy obscures a small but important part of the sophistication and flexibility of Bull's conceptual framework. For Bull is careful to situate the states system, and its element of international society, in relation to a broader world political system of which the states system is only a part.

As is well known, Bull identifies modern international society, which is global in scope, as responsible for providing the degree of 'international order' ('order among states') currently enjoyed in world politics and as contributing thereby to 'world order' (order 'among mankind as a whole') (1977, 21-2). However, he identifies international society as only one 'element' of the states system: it coexists with 'the element of war and struggle for power among states' and 'the element of transnational solidarity and conflict' (1977, 41). Moreover, he expresses concern that the modern, global, international society 'enjoys only a precarious foothold' within contemporary world politics: it, and the order it underpins, has been undermined by 'ideological divisions … the revolt of non-European peoples and states against Western dominance, and the expansion of the states system beyond its originally European or Western confines' (1977, 257-8).

Bull acknowledges that '[o]rder in world politics may one day take the form of the maintenance of elementary goals of social life in a single world society or great society of mankind', but he rejects the idea that such a society 'is already a going concern' (1977, 23). If we view Bull (and the English School more broadly) as operating with the trichotomy outlined above, this implies that although we can speculate about possible future forms of order within world society, there is, at present, nowhere else to look for order in world politics than in international society: world order consists of the international order provided by international society plus domestic order within states (Suganami this volume). If so, then this would limit the capacity of Bull's framework to illuminate today's increasingly globalised world. For as Buzan points out, if we follow Bull in conceiving of world society as being concerned with 'shared identity at the individual level' then this 'begs the question of where the organised but non-state components of global civil society', such as transnational firms and NGOs, should be located (2001, 477). As Suganami (this volume) notes, the answer lies in what Bull (1977, 276) terms the 'wider world political system' constituted by 'the world-wide network of interaction that embraces not only states but also other political actors, both "above" the state and "below" it'.

Bull explicitly recognised that the 'study of world politics should be concerned with the global political process as a whole, and this cannot be understood simply in terms of interstate politics'; he identified business enterprises, trade unions, political parties, professional associations, churches and international organisations as part of a 'transnational nexus' (1977, 277). He insisted, however, that 'the existence of a political system involving other actors as well as states' was not 'a new or recent development. The states system has always been part of a wider system of interaction' (1977, 278). Indeed, he noted that the growth of a genuinely 'global political system' in the nineteenth century 'was not simply the work of states; private individuals and groups played their part as explorers, traders, migrants, missionaries and mercenaries, and the expansion of the states system was part of a wider spread of social and economic exchange' (1977, 20-1). This led him to downplay the significance of this broader world political system in relation to world order: he doubted that, at the time he was writing, transnational relations played 'a more important role, relatively to the relationship of states, than in earlier phases of the wider political system in which they both figure' (1977, 278). He focused, instead, on the 'political structure' to which relations within the world political system have given rise, viz. 'a global system and society of states' (1977, 21). In considering the utility of Bull's conceptual framework 40 years on, however, this concept must be given a more central role.

One reason is that the transnational dimension of world politics is much more significant than it was in Bull's day. In this volume Pauly shows how the management of systemic risk in a global economy characterised by the rapid deepening of cross-border economic integration increasingly involves regulatory frameworks which, though created by states, also draw in private, market actors (see also Büthe and Mattli 2013). Similarly, Falkner (this volume) argues that the global climate regime is becoming 'transnationalised' as sub-national political authorities, businesses, and NGOs take the initiative in setting climate norms, developing low-carbon strategies, and establishing governance mechanisms. In terms of Bull's conceptual framework, such developments are, as Pauly notes, best characterised as taking place not in international society, or even in world society, but in the 'world political system'. Indeed, Falkner's contention that such developments are not easily accommodated within either international society or world society points toward the need to resuscitate this aspect of Bull's framework. This is not to say that transnational relations

are now more important than inter-state relations: Carr (this volume) points out, for example, that, despite the privileged role of US-based private transnational organisations, the states system continues to be the key mechanism for governing cyberspace. Armed with the concept of the world political system, however, we are better able to consider questions about the relative influence of competing sources of governance.

Second, Bull defines (an embryonic) 'world society' as being 'characterised by a sense of the common interests and values of all mankind – as distinct from a world political system characterised merely by global interdependence and global awareness' (1977, 289). The world political system therefore accommodates, within Bull's conceptual scheme, those transnational developments which fall short of expressing any common values espoused by mankind as a whole. It is a consistent theme of *The Anarchical Society* that, on the one hand, world order will be best served by the preservation of international society but that, on the other hand, international society is precarious and can best be strengthened by extending the consensus which underpins it, a consensus which Bull presumes will be cosmopolitan (1977, 88, 316). In the last 40 years, however, we have seen numerous developments within what Bull terms the 'world political system' which do not involve the development of a cosmopolitan consensus and which, therefore, cannot be situated within world society as Bull imagines it. For example, True (this volume) argues that the fight against patriarchy has been transnational, but it does not (yet) command a consensus. The same is true of the battle for indigenous rights (Keal this volume). Non-state groups such as the so-called Islamic State (Toros and Dionigi this volume) symbolise the lack of a cosmopolitan consensus in contemporary world politics, yet also occupy a transnational space from which they are able to both mimic and contest the norms of international society.

Developing Bull's ideas about the emerging 'world political system … of which the system of states is only part' therefore adds a new dimension of flexibility to his framework (1977, 21). It is widely recognised that Bull's understanding of international society and its place within the states system allows us to employ his framework to ask a wide range of questions about, for example

- the geographical scope of both the states system and the element of society within it;
- the degree to which the elements of war and struggle, regulated intercourse, and transnational solidarity are present and/or dominant within the states system;
- the degree to which rules of coexistence within international society are accompanied by rules of cooperation;
- how effectively the institutions of international society operate to produce order;
- the degree to which international society is underpinned by a common culture; and
- the norms which prevail in international society and whose interests they serve.

This flexibility in Bull's framework is reflected not only in the historical and normative inquiry for which the English School is well known but also, for example, in more recent empirical inquiry into regional international societies (Stivachtis 2015).

Focusing additionally on the world political system and how it relates to international society on the one hand and to a prospective future world society on the other makes accessible a further range of questions which can be asked from within Bull's framework, including questions about

- the relative importance of states and the states system, including its element of society, as compared to other actors within the world political system;
- the emergence of new actors, rules and understandings within the world political system;
- the extent to which developments in the world political system work for, or undermine, international and also domestic order;
- the extent to which developments in the world political system advance or undermine the prospects for the development of a world society, whether cosmopolitan or not.

This additional flexibility does not rule out a more traditional focus on international society, but it does open up the possibility of extending Bull's approach, not only, for example, by exploring the role of non-state actors in global governance, but also by exploring dimensions of world order, such as patriarchy, which do not fit neatly within a narrowly construed international society or a strictly cosmopolitan world society.[2]

Recognising this flexibility in Bull's framework also highlights the fact that his claims about order in world politics are, for the most part, contingent judgements. It is often noted that Bull combines multiple modes of inquiry: he is known for his critical exposition of the key concepts necessary for studying world order, for historical inquiry into the forms that world order has taken, and for his normative judgements about the relative value of order and justice and about how world order can best be provided. He also famously advocated an 'approach to theorizing … that is characterised above all by explicit reliance upon the exercise of judgement' (Bull 1966, 361). Yet it is not often recognised how provisional Bull's judgements are. His assessment of the functions performed by the institutions of international society in relation to order are not abstract, but concrete: he assesses what role they play at 'present' (1977, 101, 127, 162, 184, 200). Similarly, his judgements about the prospects for international society being superseded as a source of world order concern what is likely between the time he was writing 'and the end of the century' (1977, 257), that is, by the year 2000. His central argument that 'such prospects as there may be for order in world politics' lie in attempts to arrest the decline of international society (1977, 319) reflect these provisional judgements. It is often noted that this style of theorising contrasts strongly with the deductive reasoning and hypothesis testing which is associated, however inaccurately (Humphreys 2012), with another famous text from the same period, Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979), and which continues to dominate mainstream IR theory, especially in the US. Yet in appraising *The Anarchical Society,* it is equally important to note that, Bull's judgements being provisional, it is quite proper now to revise them.[3]

[2] There has, of course, been no shortage of work that has used English School ideas as a springboard from which to launch very different kinds of enquiries (Keene 2009, 104), of which Linklater (1998) is one outstanding example. In exploring the flexibility of Bull's framework, this volume, by contrast, and in Bullian fashion, pursues a middle ground between focusing, narrowly, as *The Anarchical Society* does, on international society, and radically reshaping Bull's approach.

[3] In the Introduction to *The Anarchical Society* Bull asks how order is 'maintained within the *present* system of sovereign states' and whether that system '*still*' provides 'a viable path to world order' (my italics) (1977, xi).

Bull's Judgements

As previously noted, Bull recognized that there is much more to world politics than international society. Several years before *The Anarchical Society* was published he observed that

> there is now a global political system of which the "international system" or states-system is only part (even if it is the most important part), and that many of the issues that have arisen within this global political system … cannot be satisfactorily dealt with in a framework that confines our attention to the relations of sovereign states. To deal with them properly we need to consider, alongside states, not only organisations of states global and regional, but international non-governmental organisations, transnational and subnational groups, individual human beings, and *in posse* if not *in esse* … [the] *magna communitas humani generis*. (1972, 255)

One question that arises, therefore, is why, in *The Anarchical Society*, Bull focused so centrally on international society. One of his judgements, clearly, was that such a focus was required, at the time he was writing, given the project in which he understood himself to be engaged. But this judgement is open to revision today, as are Bull's empirical and evaluative judgements, which are considered subsequently.

Judgements about intellectual priorities

There are two notable features of Bull's decision to focus on international society as a source of world order, despite his awareness that it forms only part of a broader world political system. First, Bull was operating in a disciplinary environment in which, he believed, the case for world politics being a *social* realm still needed to be made. It is often maintained, he notes, that

> the existence of international society is disproved by the fact of anarchy … A persistent theme in the modern discussion of international relations has been that, as a consequence of this anarchy, states do not form together any kind of society;

> and that if they were to do so it could only be by subordinating themselves to a common authority (1977, 46).

He therefore considered it important to show that 'the modern international system is also an international society' the existence of which is not 'disproved by the fact of international anarchy' (1977, 51). Second, as previously noted, Bull believed that such world order as was provided by international society was 'precarious and imperfect' (1977, 52).[4] In other words, he focused on international society because of its significance (as he judged) for world order at the time he was writing and because of the threats to it (as he judged) resulting from its expansion and consequent lack of a common culture, from the Cold War, and from the revolt against the West.

We need not now endorse either of these judgements and nor is there any strong reason for believing that Bull would reproduce them today. It is important to note, however, that Bull's decision to focus on international society does not imply an abstract judgement that it offers the best *possible* basis for world order. As captured by his criticisms of Richard Falk's more radical urgings (Falk this volume), Bull's defence of international society stems in part from his belief that 'the best could all too often be the enemy of the good' (Alderson and Hurrell 2000, 61). This indicates that Bull is not unreflexively statist or conservative. Bull's position is certainly not statist qua ontology: if, as Jackson and Nexon (2013) argue, IR theories are best understood as advancing ontologies, then Bull's is quite rich. And while Bull is in some respects a conservative thinker, Edkins and Zehfuss's complaint (2005: 461) that by concentrating on order Bull defines away politics is not wholly fair: just as Edkins and Zehfuss's analysis is motivated by their sense of what is 'important in the present circumstances' (2006, 454), so Bull's judgement about the urgency of particular questions represents a political and ethical stance.

That said, despite the continuing utility of many of Bull's insights into the make-up and functioning of international society, his narrow focus is neither warranted by the state of IR today nor adequate for comprehending world order in its entirety. Kaczmarska (this volume) shows, through her exploration of Russian ideas about world politics, that we

[4] As Bain (this volume) points out, this may be, in part, because of Bull's very understanding of order as constructed and contingent.

cannot assume that Bull's conception of world politics as an international society is shared throughout the world. Pasha (this volume) suggests that Bull's focus on the capacity of international society to provide order makes it impossible for him to recognise the true nature of the injustice felt by the victims of colonialism and the extent to which this undermines world order. Bull's narrow focus also causes him to neglect domestic order (Suganami this volume). Had he addressed it more directly, as a constituent part of world order, he might have recognised that issues such as patriarchy and indigenous rights (True; Keal this volume) are not only questions of justice, but also questions of order.

The contributions to this volume indicate, therefore, that we now need to look beyond international society in a way which Bull did not do in *The Anarchical Society*, but which his conceptual framework very much facilitates. For Linklater, although Bull was right to highlight the significance of cultural convergence and divergence for international society and hence for world order, his analysis did not go deep enough. For both Pauly and Falkner, it is necessary to focus on the transnational dimension of world politics much more centrally than Bull did. For Keal, True, Reus-Smit, and Pasha, Bull's dividing line between order and justice can no longer (if it ever could) be sustained.

Empirical judgements

The idea that world politics is a social realm now being familiar, many of Bull's empirical judgements seem quite banal, for example that, at the time he was writing, there were sufficient common rules and institutions to diagnose the existence of an international society. For the most part, the contributors to this volume do not contest these judgements, either as judgements about the world Bull inhabited or even as they apply to the present day. Ayson and Ruzicka argue that Bull's emphasis on the importance of restraint and informal understandings in great power relations remain highly relevant. They also endorse Bull's concern (1977, 117, 200-1) about the dangers that the US becoming a preponderant power would pose to world order. Carr argues that even though the attribution problem makes the application of international law in cyberspace problematic, states have resorted to informal rules and norms in a fashion consistent with Bull's observations about the operation of international society. Bull's observation that the US and Soviet Union each often recognised a need to limit the other's power, but failed to

recognise why their own actions might be interpreted as threatening (1977, 110), also speaks directly to the apparent failure of the EU and NATO, in our own time, to recognise that Russia might legitimately regard their wooing of Ukraine as threatening (Patomäki this volume; Mearsheimer 2014).

However, if Bull's judgements about international society remain insightful today, the contributors to this volume find his judgements about the broader world political system less convincing. As Pauly, Falkner, and Patomäki all point out, Bull's claim that there is nothing new about transnational forces (1977, 277-9) cannot be sustained today and was questionable even 40 years ago. Moreover, even if Bull was right that international society was then the only political structure worthy of note within the world political system, the subsequent growth of transnational regimes, most notably in the world economy but also, for example, in relation to climate change, suggests that such a claim would require greater scrutiny today. Indeed, Patomäki notes that recent regulatory changes may be construed as first steps towards the development of world government. The discussions in this volume of human rights (Reus-Smit) and indigenous rights (Keal) also bring into question the contemporary plausibility of Bull's contention that the great society of mankind is nothing but an idea, while Pasha's discussion of the colonial underpinnings of international society suggests that Bull misunderstood the nature of the justice claims of former colonial countries. More generally, Keal, True, Pasha, Falkner, and Reus-Smit all provide reason to doubt that Bull's judgement that 'ideas of cosmopolitan or world justice play very little part' in world politics (1977, 85) remains true today. The collective message, in short, is that Bull's empirical judgements about his principal focus, international society, were often quite perspicacious, but that many of his judgements about the broader world political system must today be revisited.

Evaluative judgements

Bull's evaluative judgements largely concern the prospects for world order in the future and hence involve consideration not only of international society but also of the world political system and the relationship between them. Falk acknowledges in his essay (this volume) that Bull's judgement about the likely enduring primacy of the states system proved more accurate than Falk's own belief that radical change could be achieved imminently. Yet Bull's

inadequate theorisation of the dynamics of change (Patomäki; Reus-Smit this volume) limited his capacity to predict the future. In some respects international society has in fact proved more durable than Bull imagined. He argued that 'the states system can remain viable only if the element in it of international society is preserved and strengthened', which depends 'on maintaining and extending the consensus about common interests and values that provides the foundation of its common rules and institutions, at a time when consensus has shrunk' (1977, 315). Contrary to Bull's expectations, however, international society has survived even though there has not, at a global level, been a significant growth in consensus, let alone an extension of the 'cosmopolitan culture' that, he believed, this required (1977, 316). As Linklater (this volume) observes, Bull's appreciation that the norms of international society can become divorced from attitudes toward it in domestic societies is a crucial insight. Yet Bull failed to recognise how the civilising process associated with the expansion of international society might sustain those norms even in the absence of an underlying cosmopolitan culture. More generally, Bull's lack of appreciation of the complex interplay between the domestic and the international may explain why he failed to recognise the potential impact on international society of changing ideas about empire, gender, and human rights (Pasha; True; Reus-Smit this volume).

In respect of the broader world political system, what Bull seems to have missed is the possibility that there could be such a radical extension of transnational governance without threatening the endurance of the states system and the element of international society within it. This suggests, in turn, that Bull was wrong to suppose that the prospects for change lay chiefly in international society. As Falkner (this volume) points out, Bull surmised that, in the short run, 'effective action' to tackle ecological challenges would depend 'primarily on the action of states' (1977, 294). Bull was not wholly wrong, but he failed to recognise the extent to which transnational regimes could develop in which it no longer makes sense to single out the state and the states system as the sole, or even the most important, object of study.

There is some disagreement among the contributors to this volume about whether, as Bull judged, international society remains the best bet for world order. Ayson, Carr, and Toros and Dionigi all implicitly endorse the contribution of contemporary international society to world order. However, Falkner argues that sustained action on climate change requires a

transition to more solidarist forms of governance that cannot be achieved from within a pluralist international society. Pasha argues that Bull's international society cannot adequately accommodate the justice demands of former colonial states insofar as its rules and institutions are continuous with those of the European international society that imposed colonial rule in the first place. Keal and True agree with Pasha that it is no longer plausible (if it ever was) to claim that an international society structured around the prioritisation of order over justice is the only global political structure capable of providing world order. Claims to indigenous sovereignty also bring into question Bull's presumption that an emergent world society would be cosmopolitan: Keal points out that the idea of indigenous sovereignty involves a kind of group right that is not straightforwardly compatible with Bull's individualist understanding of world justice. What these essays reveal is that contemporary world politics involves dimensions of normative contestation that Bull did not imagine. He not only misunderstood the nature of the justice claims being advanced against Western states, but also failed to anticipate that a major power such as Russia might reject international society as an organising idea for world politics (Kaczmarska this volume).

Reflecting on Bull's judgements in this fashion offers an insight into the limitations of his political vision. In respect of the workings of international society his thinking showed great dexterity. He often identified surprising ways in which developments that might appear, on the surface, to undermine world order could, in roundabout fashion, support it. For example, he argues that even when states fail to comply with a rule, to the extent that they feel compelled to offer an explanation for their non-compliance that may, in the long run, strengthen the rule (1977, 45, 137-8). This kind of normative enmeshment has proved to be a key driver of the global human rights regime (Foot 2000). By contrast, however, Bull had a relatively restricted vision of the range of alternative possibilities for world order and justice. Revealingly, although he recognised that there may be alternatives to the modern states system which do 'not conform to any previous pattern of universal political organisation', he refused to 'speculate as to what these non-historical alternatives might be' (1977, 256). The only alternatives he would consider were those for which he found evidence in the history of previous, non-global international systems. This may explain why

he was reluctant to develop the concept of the wider world political system any further than was strictly required to accommodate the transnational forces observable in the 1970s.

The Limits of Bull's Project

To the extent that the contributors to this volume question Bull's judgements, it is important to recognise that they are judgements which Bull could, and perhaps would, have revised 40 years on. His conceptual framework is, moreover, sufficiently flexible to allow for many of his judgements to be revised quite considerably, especially once we broaden our focus to encompass the world political system. However, the contributors to this volume also identify limits to the flexibility of Bull's framework. These limits arise in three main respects: its capacity to illuminate difference, its adequacy as a basis for causal inquiry, and the normative agenda it implicitly imposes.

Reus-Smit (this volume) describes Bull as a 'master of taxonomy': the distinguishing feature of Bull's theorising, Reus-Smit argues, is his 'drive to classify and categorise, to carve up a phenomenon or issue into elements or dimensions, and then compare, contrast, and relate them'. One weakness of a taxonomic approach, however, is its inability to accommodate the in-between. As previously noted, transnational forces have often been thought to sit uncomfortably between Bull's concepts of international and world society, a problem which can be somewhat rectified by rehabilitating his concept of a world political system. Yet even with this additional dimension of flexibility, some aspects of contemporary world politics are difficult to situate within Bull's framework. For example, competing conceptions of world politics, such as the idea of the 'Russian world' (Kaczmarska this volume), appear to be part of international society while simultaneously undermining its status as a 'constitutional principle of international order' (Bull 1977, 68). This suggests that, like all taxonomies, Bull's framework may be better suited to the study of some kinds of phenomena than others. It is, in this respect, an obvious limitation of *The Anarchical Society* that there are some dimensions of world politics which it does not make visible, including not only patriarchy and coloniality (True; Pasha this volume) but also, for example, race (Anievas *et al* 2015).

Reus-Smit argues, however, that Bull's taxonomic approach causes problems even in relation to the dimensions of world politics that Bull explicitly discusses, such as human rights. Bull is led by his taxonomy, Reus-Smit observes, to classify human rights as an issue of individual justice rather than of international justice, from which he infers that human rights claims are potentially subversive of international order. What Bull therefore fails to see is that human rights are power mediators: arguments about the rights of individuals are also arguments about the limits of state authority. In Bull's terms, Reus-Smit suggests, human rights are therefore about both individual and international justice, exposing the inflexibility of a taxonomic architecture in which they are required to be one or the other. Pasha (this volume) argues, similarly, that Bull's dichotomy between order and justice prevents him from recognising the true depth of what he later (2000) termed the 'revolt against the West'. Because he classified Third World demands as being about justice, rather than order, because he believed that justice could not be secured without order, and because he believed that such world order as was currently available was provided by international society, Bull argued that international society would have to accommodate

> the demands of Asian, African and Latin American countries and peoples for just change in respect of the elimination of colonialism and white supremacist governments, the redistribution of wealth and resources, and the ending of the relationship of dependence of subordination in which most of them stand to the rich countries. (1977, 300)

What Bull therefore failed to recognise, Pasha argues, is that these demands were also, and fundamentally, about order. Because Bull classified them as questions of justice, he failed to see that no order in which the institutions complicit in colonialism were preserved could be satisfactory.

Bull's lack of vision in this regard is connected to the second major limitation of his approach: his failure to adequately theorise change. As noted in Suganami's introduction (this volume), Bull is often thought of as an interpretive rather than a causal thinker. Indeed, my focus on the flexibility of his conceptual framework underlines the primarily interpretive thrust of *The Anarchical Society*. Bull does, nonetheless, claim that the rules and institutions of international society contribute causally to international order (1977, 74).

As Patomäki (this volume) points out, however, this claim is under-developed: Bull does not specify the range of causal powers, mechanisms, or processes that a systematic causal approach would have to consider. Reus-Smit links this failure directly to Bull's taxonomic approach – such an approach, he argues, is oriented toward static rather than dynamic analysis: toward classifying phenomena as being one thing or the other, rather than toward developing a generative account of their emergence, evolution, and impact. Patomäki argues that Bull's failure to anticipate the extent to which developments in the global economy would impact upon international security reflects his failure to develop this kind of generative theorising.

The final major limitation in Bull's approach identified in this volume is his inadequate account of the normative basis of his own theorising. Bain (this volume) argues that whereas Bull describes his approach as Grotian, in fact his account of order is Hobbesian: Bull understands order as constructed and contingent, rather than as reflecting any natural ordering of things. The cause of this confusion lies in Bull's use of Augustine's definition of order, which was itself part of a medieval dispute about the nature of God and the extent of his power (1977, 3-4). One implication of Bain's argument is that international society, as Bull understands it, has not outgrown its European and Christian roots to the extent that Bull suggests. The problem this creates is twofold. First, whereas Bull represents the goals of life, truth, and property as 'elementary, primary, or universal goals of social life' (1977, 5), he was presenting a normative vision which is more substantively shaped by Christian ideas of freedom, autonomy, and moral responsibility than he admits, a vision which is then somewhat concealed by his subsequent distinction between order and justice. Second, as previously noted, the conceptual framework he goes on to develop fails to illuminate key dimensions of normative contestation in world politics today, such as the legacy of colonialism and the unravelling of patriarchy (Pasha; True this volume).

Future Directions

Bain's suggestion that we can improve our understanding of Bull by recognising what his analysis owes to debates in mediaeval theology brings us to the directions for further inquiry suggested by this volume. Some of these are familiar. For example, while many contributions indicate the need to resuscitate Bull's conception of the world political

system, the further development of Bull's conceptual vocabulary forms a key part of Buzan's agenda for 'reconvening the English School' (2001, 479). Similarly, while Reus-Smit, True, and Linklater (this volume) all point to the need to revise Bull's narrative of the emergence of international society so as better to incorporate, respectively, the role of contestation over human rights, of patriarchal structures within domestic societies, and of Western ideas about civilised manners, this form of inquiry, too, is a well-established part of the English School's research agenda. This volume has, though, identified three newer avenues of inquiry which those interested in developing Bull's approach in *The Anarchical Society* and in relating it to contemporary world politics might also pursue.

The first of these is to develop a more substantive theorisation of dynamic processes. Its lack of causal inquiry has long been noted as a weakness of the English School (see Finnemore 2001, 510), but there is an outstanding question about what form such inquiry should take. Keene articulates one possibility, arguing that although international society is often construed as an ideal type, Bull's inquiry into international order fails to 'fulfil the *causal* aspirations of the Weberian project' (2009, 116). This is not, however, the kind of causal inquiry that is prized by most mainstream IR theorists. The contributions to this volume identify three alternative possibilities. Patomäki's discussion implies that in order to develop a more satisfactory causal analysis of the dynamics of world order it is necessary to engage in a more systematic specification of underlying causal powers, mechanisms, and processes. Reus-Smit indicates how we might develop a generative theory of international social change by focusing on how rights regimes have, by distributing legitimate social powers, empowered some actors and disempowered others, thereby creating powerful incentives for change. Linklater, meanwhile, illustrates the potential of a more sociological inquiry into the complex relationship between cultural ideas, norms, and practices at the domestic and international levels.

A second possible direction for further inquiry consists in identifying more clearly the situatedness of Bull's approach, that is, the extent to which it draws on assumptions of which Bull himself may not have been fully aware. Bain's contention that Bull's account of international order is shaped by a dispute in mediaeval theology is significant in this regard because, as Bain points out, Bull was so hostile to religion. This suggests that Bull himself was not aware of the roots of the concepts and arguments on which he drew, from which

we might infer that he was equally unaware of the normative slant they brought to his framework. Kaczmarska (this volume) emphasises the importance of viewing Bull's conceptual framework as offering a representation of the world, a representation that is no less situated than alternative conceptual framings, such as the 'Russian world', which liberal, Western scholars may more readily regard as ideologically loaded. Insofar as our focus is on the value of the interpretive framework Bull provides, these contributions remind us that, as Weber observed, all knowledge of social life is 'knowledge from a *specific point of view*' (2004, 381).

The final direction of further inquiry suggested by this volume is to revisit Bull's ideas about what a just world order might potentially consist in. As previously noted, Bull offers a provisional defence of international society, despite the injustices associated with it. Yet he also surmises that '[w]orld justice may be ultimately reconcilable with world order' in a 'world or cosmopolitan society that provides for both' (1977, 88). However, he has little to say about the content of a just world order beyond his supposition that it will be underpinned by a 'cosmopolitan society' or 'cosmopolitan community' (1977, 26, 68, 152, 275), a supposition which appears to be rooted in his belief that the modern international society is itself underpinned by a cosmopolitan culture (1977, 316-7). This lack of interest in the form which an alternative to the states system might take is, once again, illustrative of Bull's restricted political vision. The contributions to this volume open up some tantalizing possibilities. Pasha's analysis indicates how closely the cosmopolitan culture which Bull prized is implicated in the historical injustice of colonialism. Keal's analysis of claims to indigenous sovereignty indicates the need for a just world order to accommodate group rights. True's analysis of the unravelling of patriarchy indicates the backlash that the spread of Western values can create. Falkner, meanwhile, raises the question of how a transition to a more solidarist basis for human affairs might be possible.

These possible future directions of inquiry all relate, broadly, to Bull's political vision. If *The Anarchical Society* remains relevant today partly because it is so much more than a treatise on international society, then we must also accept that, in looking beyond international society, Bull's vision is limited. In developing that vision, however, we would do well to retain something of Bull's commitment to justice, his appreciation of the value of order, his

sensitivity to the difficult trade-offs that are the stuff of politics, and his caution about pressing our knowledge claims too far and too fast.

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